

Radiant Church, September 27, 2020
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The Church We Can Be Part 5

Acts 20:28 *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

Pay careful attention to what?

If simply caring for people in the church, the word would have been “be faithful” or “be diligent”

If taking note of their own character issues, Paul could have said, “be consistent,” or “be mindful”

But the wording Paul chose to use (“pay attention”) means something different

Our culture and context are so post-Christian, most people in Juneau (including people in some of our churches) have no cultural memory, or awareness, or understanding left of foundational, fundamental Christian beliefs

And what they may remember, or think they remember, they challenge, or at least try to alter

Today, if they use the word “Gospel,” it means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. A chosen agenda? Some form of righting a social ill? A particular political party’s election platform and desired results?

If we don’t truly understand the holiness of God we won’t truly understand or appreciate the significance of the presence of ‘God with us.’

Ortho + doxy = right + belief, or good + teaching, or sound + doctrine

“Orthodoxy” for Christians means, the core beliefs that closely align with Scripture’s intended meaning, specifically the central theme of the Bible, the gospel

It also means the core beliefs, the non-negotiables that the Church has held since the beginning (in Acts 2)

What we believe and live is based on what God has revealed in the Bible; what is true about God, His world, and our place in it

So Paul says what he says about what the leaders in the church must do, all the time. And then he follows with a warning, if not a dire prediction

Acts 20:29 *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;*

He calls them wolves. Mice just run around in your attic or make a minor mess in your garage. Wolves want to tear your face off and eat you

It may not be the most common, but the greatest threat to the health of Jesus's church is never financial, relational, cultural or demographic. It is always theological.

While Paul had been with them, he probably kept the heretics away
But since he was never to be in person with this church again - wolves would now show up

There are people in Juneau who do just this. They wait until a church has a gap in their leadership, maybe beginning a pastoral transition, and they try to slip in

Or they go and visit whatever the newest church in town happens to be
And offer to help, even help lead this new church
Looking for a captive, and trusting audience

Usually, these same wolves don't come immediately from another church. They get found out and chased away. They will have long gaps in between their different church affiliations

Acts 20:30 *and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

“Speak twisted things” means to distort, to make defective, or corrupt, to turn away, to deviate.

The only thing worse than a “Wolf in sheep's clothing” is a “Wolf in Shepherd's clothing”

Insiders who decide to go “off road” are worse than outsiders who come in already off roaders

Paul is not just warning them, he is predicting that some of them will become heretics

Paul is warning the pastors to be on the strictest guard against heresies

- Legalism
- Narcissism
- Secularism
- Syncretism
- Universalism
- Prosperity gospel
- Therapeutic gospel
- Social gospel

Any gospel contrary to the gospel we received

Paul tells the Ephesians elders to pay careful attention to themselves
To insure they're not guilty, or become guilty of teaching heresy
And Paul tells them to pay attention to each other as well
Somebody has to know when another leader is going off the rails

Galatians 1:9 *As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed*

Paul is making sure that every elder there on the beach knows his role, and his duty
Feeding the sheep
Leading the sheep
And protecting the sheep...from their own sin...and from wolves

This is why elders must be “able to teach”

In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, the qualifications for elders are almost all about character
Except one: able to teach

And it says, “He must not be a recent convert,” meaning, he already knows what is orthodox, what is right and true from God’s Word - and can teach that to anyone else

Because the church needs to be fed, to be led, and to be protected

And because an elder must be able to teach, this does not negate that requirement for other members of the church

GC leaders, Kid’s Ministry leaders, worship leaders, Moms and Dads have to know what wolves look like, sound like, and be able to protect others from those wolves

We each have to know the difference between truth and heresy

Because Paul has already said, those wolves are coming